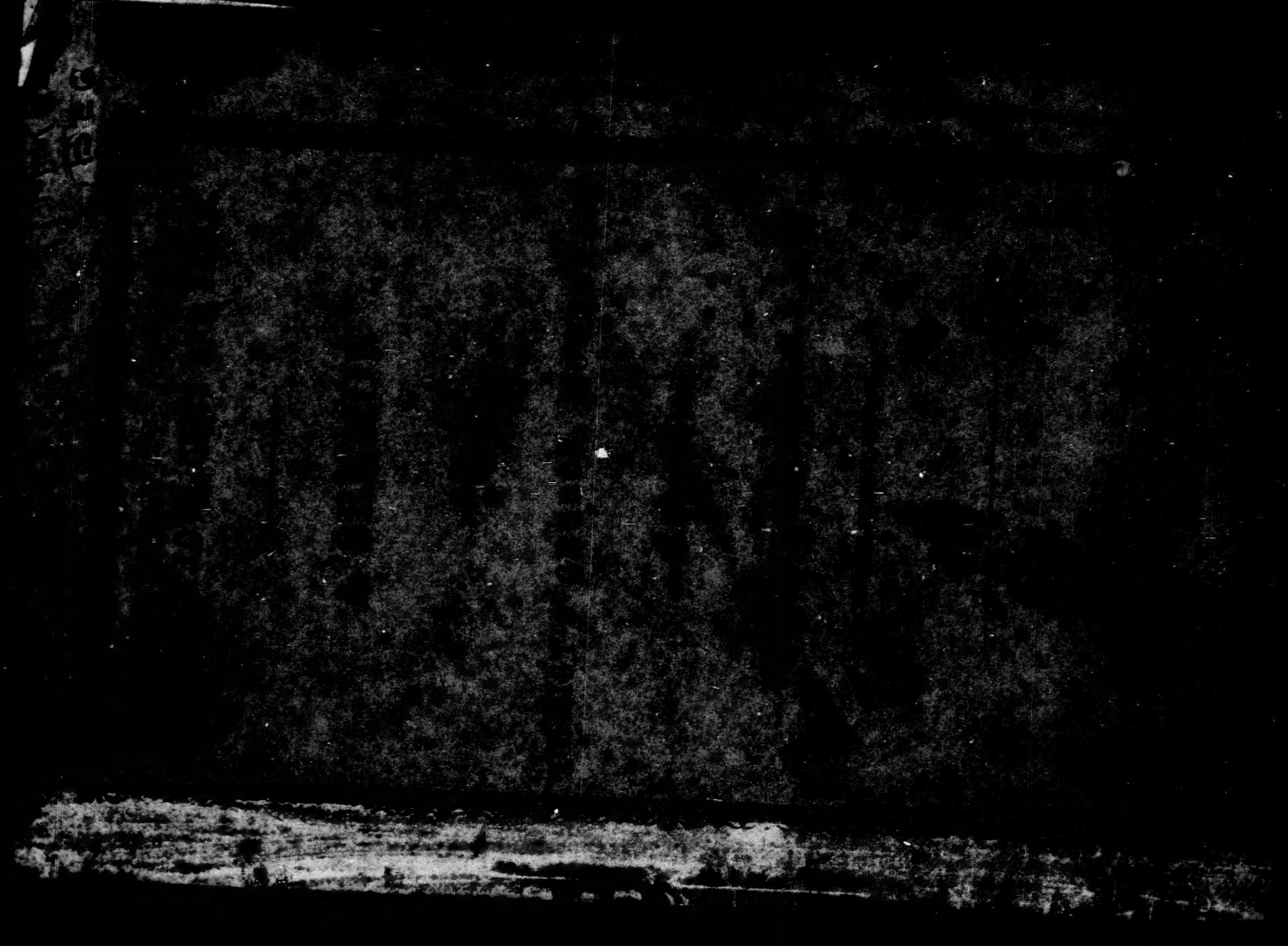

# CHRISTIAN LOVE, UNITY AND PEACE.

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# A SERMON

PREACHED IN

## CHRIST'S CHURCH, MONTREAL,

ON THE 17TH JUNE, 1866,

BY THE REV. A. BETHUNE, D. D.,

RECTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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# SERMON.

1st John, chapter iii, verse 23.

"And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."

In the Epistle appointed by the Church for this morning's service, the beloved disciple St. John draws the line of distinction between the world, or the unconverted Jews and Heathen, and the faithful followers of Christ. He compares their different states to those of death and life. "We know that we have passed from death unto life,"—we who were once unconverted Jews or Heathen, were in a state of death, but now that we are Christians we are in a state of life. We were once in the region and shadow of death—in that kingdom where sin and death reigned—but now we are in the kingdom of life, whose King is the Prince and author of life—and how do we know that we have removed from the one territory to the other? "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It is the great principle of love which the beloved disciple is enforcing here and throughout his writings, as the basis, the moving spring of all Christian duty, and the distinguishing characteristic of the faithful and true followers of his beloved master—for "*this* is *His* commandment, that we love one another." It is indeed the fountain from which all Christian graces flow, producing, among other fruits, that unity so beautifully described by the Royal

Psalmist, when he likens it, in its blissful and grateful effects and in its component parts, to that precious ointment, compounded of the most costly and odoriferous spices, with which the High Priest was consecrated to the service of God, and which was poured on him in such abundance, that, running over his face, even to the collar of his garment, which bore the names of the tribes of Israel, shed its grateful fragrance on all around. Even so, said the Psalmist, doth this holy concord so shed its influence over all as to make them dear to God, and to procure for them a good odour, or an excellent fame among men. He farther compares it to "the dew of Heaven that descended upon the mountains of Sion—for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore," shewing that the dews of Heaven are not more necessary, or more refreshing to the thirsty soil of a mountain, than love and unity among all ranks, conditions and societies of men—for to this is immutably annexed that divine favour which will pour innumerable blessings upon such societies. Come then, brethren, let us look into this refreshing picture of the blessings of love and unity—let us lay it to heart and apply it profitably to our own case.

Perhaps there never was a time, amidst the fluctuating hopes and fears of this noble Colony, when the operation of this principle, in its purest and most extensive signification, was more loudly called for in all good men and true, than at the present; assuredly we may say there never was a country whose circumstances more imperatively demanded its fullest cultivation, than this in which it has pleased Providence to cast our lot. It has been the policy of Great Britain—the country which many of us love as the land of our nativity—which others of us love as the land of our fathers—and which *all* of us love as the home of our protection and security, in all those blessings of civil and religious liberty which here we all so abundantly enjoy—it has been the policy of the government of that land to fling wide open

the gates of this Colony to the free ingress of all the nations of the world. The consequence is, we have a population as varied in its national origin as the hues of that bow which God suspended in the arch of Heaven, when the outpourings of His wrath against the general corruption of mankind had subsided, as an emblem of peace, and of assurance against the recurrence of the same awful calamity. May the varied hues of our national origin serve also as an emblem of our peace and unity with each other—and why should they not? To speak of those who are accustomed to assemble together in this House of God as friends, and to worship together as Christians and brethren—how many different nations may they be said to represent? and yet what motives have they not for unity and brotherly love! First, they have the motive of mutual respect and admiration as the representatives of nations renowned for deeds of heroic valour, but more especially for the cultivation and spread of those principles which most emphatically promote peace and good will towards men. That mutual respect which the representatives of three of those nations should here feel for each other, has long since led to a union, in their father-land, which is legally, and we trust firmly and permanently established; so that *they* should consider each other in no other relation than as of one nation and one kindred—and with regard to another whose children and more remote descendants also assemble in this House of God, they have long stood among the foremost of the nations of modern times. Whether we consider that nation as the powerful rival of Great Britain, contending with her even for the dominion of the seas, or as mingling in her ranks as friends fighting for the cause of the freedom of Europe when menaced by the gigantic power and talent of one who aimed at universal despotism—or as giving a long and glorious line of princes to her throne—or whether we consider that nation as no less celebrated in the walks of literature, science and the arts, we shall find abundant cause

for our respect and admiration. And we shall find that this feeling abates nothing of its power if we consider her children in the character of settlers in this Colony; for a more industrious, steady, orderly, loyal, and we may add prosperous set of men does not exist among Her Majesty's subjects in this part of her dominions.

We have, secondly, a more powerful motive for love and unity, in our mutual interests and happiness, as inhabitants of the same country, as subjects of the same Sovereign, and enjoying the same public blessings. Inhabiting together a land of which the climate, though somewhat severe, is salubrious; of which the soil is rich and productive; of which the natural resources are almost inexhaustible, and of which the system of government is free, what cause have not we to rejoice in these abundant blessings of Providence and to cultivate and cherish that spirit of love, producing its best fruits of unity and peace, without which we cannot hope for their preservation.

If we extend our observation beyond the limits of these walls, we shall find that here the adopted children of Britain, whom she rescued from a state of political slavery, are generously permitted to enjoy the same privileges of self government and consequent freedom which are the birthright of her native born sons—I say *generously* permitted, because she has generously carried her indulgence of their national peculiarities, both civil and religious, far beyond the stipulated conditions of surrender to her arms—and here too, the native of every clime who desires to escape from the oppressions, the trammels, and the insecurity or the inconveniences of despotism at home, finds a secure refuge and resting place, where he can worship God in peace, after the manner of his forefathers—where he is freed from the burden of oppressive taxation, and where his steady conduct and industry are sure to be blessed with the reward of easy if not prosperous circumstances.

My brethren, if these blessings do not seem to be appre-

ciated—if discontent, or the desire of innovation or of undue preponderance, or of national or sectional domination on the part of those who are never satisfied, whose minds are constantly dwelling on unsubstantial, intangible abstractions, rather than on sober realities, have endeavoured to convince us that the blessings we enjoy are no blessings, if they have desired us to loosen our hold of what we know and feel to be good, and to grasp at mere phantoms, the creations of visionary minds, let us hope that they have not been able to influence the sober, steady common sense of those who prefer the actual possession of the foundations of real enjoyment to visions of baseless fabrics, like those magnificent cloudy masses which one blast of the winds of heaven rears into the semblance of magnificent cities or gigantic mountains, but which the next scatters and reduces to its original shapelessness; or, on the other hand, if, in the language of our Bishop, "any class or portion of the population may conceive that they have cause to complain of any grievances," or if an impression of the necessity of redress "is deeply seated in multitudes of breasts within our own congregations," the seeking for that redress in the spirit of love and peace will be far more certain of success, of permanent and enduring success, than by any other means which involve its violation. For of this we are certain, and it is a melancholy reflection, that the depravity of the human heart is such that men cannot repose, with any safety, on any privilege or feeling of his own mere suggestion. But the same attribute of Divine mercy which has placed so many blessings at our disposal, has apprised us of our own unassisted capacity to make the best use of them, and has furnished us with such principles, as the foundations of human conduct, as will ensure that love and unanimity which are so necessary to our happiness, but which cannot exist upon any less solid basis. Accordingly we find that, in proportion as men have adhered to the precepts of the divine law, in the same

proportion have love, unanimity and peace prevailed among them, and in the same proportion have they been prosperous and happy. When the Jews of old, the chosen people of God, observed His commandments and the purity of His worship, they remained in the full possession of His promised blessings—but when they forsook His law for that of man—when they reared to themselves altars after the fashion of their idolatrous neighbours, they were abandoned to their own vain imaginations, until the afflictive consequences drove them back, as humble, penitent supplicants, to the mercy-seat of God. And, with regard to the Christian dispensation, one great purpose of it is to banish from the minds of men all those malignant and turbulent passions which fill the world with disorder and misery, and to introduce, in their stead, everything that tends to turn away wrath, to soften resentment and to cherish peace; a compassionate tenderness and fellow-feeling for the miseries of others, and a benevolence as extensive as the whole creation of God. And, in fact, these effects have followed the march of genuine Christianity. For, although it has not always been so well understood, nor so honestly practised as it might have been—although its spirit has often been mistaken and its precepts misapplied, yet, under all these disadvantages, it has generally produced a visible and a blessed change in those points which most materially concern the peace and quiet of the world. Its beneficent spirit has spread itself through all the different relations and modifications of life, and communicated its kindly influence to almost every public and private concern of mankind. It has insensibly worked itself into the inmost frame and constitution of civil states—it has given a tinge of softness to the complexion of their Governments, and to the temper and administration of their laws—it has restrained the spirit of rulers and controlled the madness of the people—it has softened the rigor of despotism itself, and tamed even the insolence of conquest—it has, in some degree, even

blunted the edge of the sword and thrown a veil of mercy over the horrors of war. If these effects have not always been produced, the failure has been occasioned by the unfaithful adoption or hypocritical following of Christian principles. If we look into the civil institutions of the different nations of the world, we shall find them partaking of the true, solid spirit of freedom, of justice, of equity, of toleration and of unanimity, just in proportion to the prevalence among them of pure unadulterated Christianity; and that, throughout the more enlightened parts of Christendom, there prevails a gentleness of manners widely different from the ferocity of the most enlightened nations of Pagan antiquity, or of modern infidelity or superstition. In short, the precepts of Christianity are designed for the guidance of man in every condition of life—religious, moral and social; they inculcate alike our duty to ourselves, to each other, to our country and to our God—they teach obedience to law and order in every relation of life—obedience from children to parents, from servants to masters, and from people in all communities, to magistrates, rulers and kings. And so just is the law of God, so equitable are the precepts of our holy religion, that while they inculcate obedience on the one hand, they demand justice and equity on the other. Children are to "obey their parents in all things," but fathers are not to "provoke their children to anger;" servants are to "obey in all things their masters," but masters are to "give unto their servants that which is just and equal;" subjects are to "obey the king as supreme," but kings are to rule "in all godliness and honesty;" and all are commanded, "in all things whatsoever they do, to do all to the glory of God." His glory, His laws which are made for his glory, demand that "all things be done decently and in order." The inference is clear and undeniable—children, servants and subjects or citizens are not to seek redress of their grievances, real or imaginary, from their parents, their masters and their rulers by violence.

In the two former cases there is the protection of law—in the latter there is an appeal to the constitutional compact, by which the conduct of the governors and the governed are equally regulated. St. Paul claimed exemption from the punishment of stripes on the legal ground of Roman citizenship; and he appealed from the Roman Governor to Cæsar. And shall we doubt or fear the justice of our Christian Sovereign, or of the Christian people of England —of that great and noble country which stands pre-eminent on the bright roll of fame in modern times—where the arts and sciences have found their birth-place, and have been cradled and nurtured and cherished into a growth so gigantic and so powerful as to appear almost miraculous—the country in which civil and religious liberty have also found not only their birth-place, but their nursing fathers and their nursing mothers, until they have acquired a strength and an endurance which no human efforts, not all the convulsions of the nations of Europe have been able to overthrow —the country which has wrested this and many other colonies from the iron grasp of despotism, only to release them from the thraldom of oppression and set them free,—receiving them into her bosom, cherishing them with all the fondness of a mother, and blessing them with the enjoyment of her own matchless institutions. Nay, brethren, we should rather rejoice in the *privilege* of calling such a country MOTHER, and of appealing and trusting to her justice and protection—as peaceable, dutiful children; and with hearts so filled with gratitude and love as to prompt the feelings of the Jewish captives who, at the remembrance of their beloved Zion, sat down to weep by the waters of Babylon; and as they wept exclaimed:—"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning—if I do not remember thee; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."